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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report was to examine the progress of 60 local school districts toward attaining the goals of Missouri's Career Ladder Program. The goals were identified as teacher retention, teacher responsibility, professional growth, teacher sharing, teacher collaboration, and student enhancement. The assessment documents of 58 ladder districts were analyzed. These districts had been in the program for two years and had submitted assessments of their career ladder program to the state agency. Site visits were made to 44 of these districts. The results indicate that academic enrichment and remedial programs have enhanced learning opportunities for students; that effective teachers already on staff are remaining in the district; and that the school and community are increasingly communicating. Participants also report greater teacher involvement in school organizations and increased professional interactions. (Author)

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THE CAREER LADDER PROCESS IN MISSOURI: A REPORT ON HOW DISTRICTS ARE REALIZING THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

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and
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(DRAFT- Not for citation without authors' consent)

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Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, March 1989.

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Abstract

The purpose of this report was to examine the progress of 60 local school districts toward attaining the goals of Missouri's Career Ladder Program. The goals were identified as teacher retention, teacher responsibility and professional growth; teacher sharing and collaboration and student enhancement.

The assessment documents of 58 career ladder districts were analyzed. These districts had been in the program for two years and had submitted assessments of their career ladder program to the state agency. Site visits were also made to 44 of these districts.

The results indicate: that academic enrichment and remedial programs have enhanced learning opportunities for students; that effective teachers already on staff are remaining in the district and that there is increased communication between the school and community. Participants also report greater teacher involvement in the school organizations and increased professional interactions. Teachers would prefer that the money were available for all professionals. Most, however, are willing to do whatever is required.

Introduction

The key to improving the quality of education is to improve the quality of the teaching staff. The present career ladder movement is one attempt to restructure traditional responsibilities and attitudes about teaching. It targets teachers and potential teachers who are talented, bright and seek the opportunity to grow and progress within their profession. (Hart, 1985.)

It is said that our teaching staffs are ill-prepared for the challenges of today's classroom. Couple this fact with the low status, low salary and isolation afforded teachers and the factors affecting our inability to recruit and retain become stronger. We are attracting fewer of the best and brightest to careers in teaching. Among graduating high school seniors, potential education majors ranked 14th among the 16 fields on SAT verbal scores and 15th on math scores (Sykes, 1983, Weaver, 1979). These prospective education majors' test scores are declining at a more rapid rate than those of the national college bound population as a whole. (Weaver, 1981). We are also unable to retain the most academically talented graduates of teacher education programs. Many of our good teachers are leaving the profession...those most likely to succeed in the classroom are those most likely to leave it. (Rosenholtz, 1985).

How are we to attract and retain the quality teacher in the classroom? Commission reports from the Holmes Group (Holmes, 1986) and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (Carnegie, 1986) cited the need to restructure teaching and teacher education. Both also indicated that a career path for teachers should be a part of this restructuring. (Frieberg, 1986.)

Rosenholtz's (1986) research indicates that increasing teacher responsibilities also increases the psychic rewards of teaching and the likelihood of teachers remaining in the profession. Teachers want the opportunity to assume responsibilities commensurate with their talents and abilities. They wish to be recognized for a job well done. State governments responded to these concerns about attracting and retaining quality teachers by legislating an array of programs designed to provide job satisfaction, recognition, responsibility and career advancement.

In the Spring of 1983 no state had developed or implemented merit incentive programs for teachers or school administrators (Cornett, 1985). By 1985 career ladders, merit pay plans or similar incentives were included in the reform agendas of 40 of the 50 states. By 1988, 25 career ladder incentive programs were operating state wide and nine state programs were under development or in the planning stages (Cornett, 1988). These programs which were designed to enhance the attractiveness of the profession and retain quality teachers, also had public support. According to a 1986 Gallup poll, a significant percentage of the non-teaching public would welcome a career ladder-like incentive plan. Communities seem to accept a "business" approach to teacher advancement and compensation. They see career ladders as one way to restructure a profession that has remained basically unchanged for many years (Taylor, 1988).

Theoretical Perspective

The teacher career ladder programs implemented in the several states have certain common features. Teachers may progress from entry level through master teacher in 3 to 5 steps, a progression that may

take from 10 to 14 years. Each stage of the ladder requires an evaluation of instructional behaviors and increased job responsibilities.

Some career ladder programs are implemented statewide as in Texas or Tennessee. Teachers apply directly to the State and then promotion requests are reviewed by state assessment teams (Malen & Murphy, 1985). Others are state programs that give the local district authority to develop practices and procedures. These are found in Utah and Missouri. Career ladders may also be developed, implemented and funded at the district level as in Fairfax County, Virginia, DeKalb, Georgia and Ladue, Missouri.

Teachers on a career path are those whose teaching effectiveness is recognized and documented. Who will evaluate these teachers? What lines of evidence will be used? Tennessee and North Carolina developed classroom evaluation instruments for use statewide by teams of evaluators. South Carolina focused on student achievement as one measure of effectiveness (Cornett, 1988). Evaluation systems continue to receive close scrutiny and much debate in states implementing performance incentive programs.

Lortie (1986) defined career ladders as an ongoing opportunity for teachers to assume new roles and greater authority, with "compensation commensurate with the new roles." Thus career ladder programs may expand or redefine the teacher's roles beyond the classroom. Malen et al, (1987) identify two types of such programs--job expansion and job redesign. In a job expansion career ladder model a teacher assumes additional responsibilities while maintaining a primary assignment in the classroom. A job redesign model changes the primary assignment from teacher to other roles such as mentorship, supervisor,

curriculum leader and the like. Rosenholtz (1986) classifies these new roles as project assignments and function assignments. Upper stage teachers on project assignments develop curriculum and instructional programs. Teachers on function assignments work with less experienced or less skilled teachers.

Historical Perspective

The Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan (hereafter called Career Ladder) was included in the education reform legislation enacted in the State in 1985. The student population in the public schools was growing and research had indicated that by the next decade more than half of the 48,000 teachers, librarians and counselors would retire, quit or leave the classroom for other reasons. College teacher education programs were not graduating pre-service teachers in sufficient numbers to fill the void. The state, like the nation, was moving from a period of teacher surplus to teacher shortage.

The state legislature created a three-stage career ladder program for teachers, librarians and counselors to: 1) recognize and reward teaching excellence; 2) promote teacher satisfaction and 3) enhance student performance. Successful participants in the program could receive $1500, $3000 or $5000 for meeting Stage I, II or III qualifications and completing career development plans.

The state and the local school district share the cost of the program on a variable match rate basis. Districts pay from 10% to 65% of the total cost with the State's share ranging from 90% to 35%. Districts may also receive an additional 5% in State funding by raising a levy in an amount sufficient to pay the entire cost of the local contribution.

Guidelines for the Missouri program were developed by an advisory committee of 35 members representing teachers, administrators, school board members and the lay community. They developed a model career ladder program that was approved by the State Board of Education for implementation in districts throughout the State.

In the first year of the program (1986-87) 2,369 (5%) of Missouri's 48,000 teachers in 63 (12%) of the 545 school districts met the qualifications and chose to write a Stage I plan. In the second year of the program (1987-88) three of these districts dropped their participation. Of the remaining 60 districts, 13 (22%) remained with Stage I plans and 47 (78%) districts implemented Stage II. The second year saw a total of 5,704 teachers completing the program. Of these career ladder participants 780 were continuing on Stage I, 1,632 on Stage II and 2,678 were in 61 school districts that were joining the program.

In the program's third year (1988-89), 147 (27%) school districts and 6,000 (13%) teachers are participating in the program. Stage I plans are implemented in 70 of these districts, 44 have Stage II programs and 33 school districts have fully implemented three-stage career ladder programs. The total number of districts includes the return of two districts that dropped the program after the first year and 27 districts that are new to the program. (See Appendix, Table I.)

The Missouri career ladder program incorporates several features found in other incentive programs. It provides a salary supplement for a combination of experience, increased responsibility, performance ratings, participation in special district projects and professional

development. Teaching however remains the career ladder participant's main responsibility.

Criteria for teacher participation in the Missouri career ladder program are summarized in Table II. (See Appendix.) A career ladder participant receives a salary supplement for meeting the qualifications for the respective stage, and for completing additional responsibilities in areas identified in the district's career ladder program.

Definition of Terms

Performance based teacher evaluation is built on "job-related criteria that are formulated from known factors about effective school teaching behaviors" (Guidelines for Performance Based Teacher Evaluation in Missouri, page 7). The process was mandated for all Missouri school districts in legislation passed in 1983. The state agency provided suggested guidelines for local district measures based on effective schools research. The career ladder participant is evaluated by the school principal.

A career development plan contains the participant's statement of personal professional goals that relate to the district's career ladder process. It describes the responsibilities that the participant will complete while on the career ladder. The career development plan also addresses how these responsibilities relate to the local district's career ladder goals. Each career development plan is reviewed, monitored and approved by a peer review committee for congruency with these district goals.

A career ladder participant is a certified teacher, librarian or counselor with five years of teaching experience in Missouri public schools.

Description

Sixty of the original 63 school districts continued their participation in the career ladder program after the initial year. The school districts are small, primarily rural, and receive the major portion of their career ladder funding from the State. The smallest participating district has 59 students, the largest has 11,000 students. Thirteen districts (22%) have a student population of between 300 and 400. Thirty-two districts (53%) have fewer than 500 students. (See Table III.)

The local district shares the cost of its career ladder program with the State. The amount of local share is calculated using a formula based on the income factor of the district and its assessed valuation. The distribution of the 60 districts according to the percent of program cost paid for by the State is found in Table IV. Thirty-seven (61%) of these districts receive 80% or more of their career ladder funds from the State.

Data Sources

District career ladder plans, program assessments and observations from site visits provide the data for this report.

Each career ladder district has filed a copy of its district career ladder plan with the stage agency. These plans, which were developed by local committees of teachers, administrators, school board members and patrons, contain the district career ladder priorities and district policies and procedures for implementing the plan.

At the end of each career ladder year, participating districts assess their respective programs and forward copies of their findings to the state agency. These documents take on various forms, including

surveys, narratives, short answers, lists of responsibilities or any combination thereof. Assessment documents were received from 58 of the 60 districts. Of the two non-reporting districts, one failed to submit documents for either the 1986 or 1987 career ladder year. The other district had no teacher to apply for the program during the first two years of the program.

Over the three years of the program, site visits have been made to 44 (73%) of the 60 career ladder districts. Interviews were held with superintendents, principals, teachers and school board members. The results of these interviews are incorporated into this report.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the progress of 60 districts toward attaining the goals of the career ladder program. These districts joined the program at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year.

According to the Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan Guidelines, (1986) the purpose of a career ladder process is:

> to promote excellence by recognizing and rewarding effective teaching thus enhancing student performance. . . to encourage teachers to remain as teachers by providing opportunities for increased responsibility and compensation. The career ladder should be a positive process which fosters professional growth, the exchange of ideas and cooperation among teachers. (p.7)

An analysis of the purpose reveals eight specific goals for the career ladder process. They are:

1. Recognize effective teaching
2. Reward effective teaching
3. Enhance student growth
4. Retain teachers
5. Increase teacher responsibility
6. Encourage professional growth
7. Encourage sharing of ideas
8. Foster faculty collaboration.

Two of these goals (numbers 1 and 2) are not specifically evaluated in the districts' assessment documents. Effective teaching is recognized in the performance based teacher evaluation process. The reward for effective teaching is in the salary supplement, paid to the participant at the end of the school year. The remaining six goals were developed into a checklist for tallying information that was provided in the assessment documents.

Each item in the checklist is discrete and reflects the goals of the career ladder program as identified in the Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan Guidelines (1986). The items in the checklist are:

1. Career ladders enhance student performance
2. Career ladders promote teacher retention
3. Career ladders lead to increased involvement in the school and community
4. Career ladders encourage professional growth
5. Career ladders foster the sharing of ideas
6. Career ladders foster faculty cooperation and collaboration.

A case-survey aggregation analysis was made of each assessment document (Guba & Lincoln, 1983). The specific references to responsibilities in each goal area were tallied. Only the actual appearance of the reference in either the 1987 or 1988 assessment document was noted.

Analysis of Data

Career ladders enhance student performance in 76% of the 58 districts. These districts reported gains in test scores and increases in enrollment in upper level courses. Tutoring programs for marginal and accelerated students were made available. New courses were added to the curriculum. Enrichment activities such as quiz

bowls, academic fairs, art festivals provided additional outlets for students that would not have been possible during the regular school day. With career ladder responsibilities, a greater variety of programs and activities were available to tap into the interests of even the least involved student.

Career ladders foster teacher retention. This goal was addressed in 14 (23%) of the assessment documents. The districts reported either no teacher leaving the district or a significant decrease in the turnover rates. Career ladder districts could now compete with their neighboring districts. Teachers in career ladder districts were not changing jobs for more lucrative positions at the same rate. One district reported 30% of its faculty leaving in the year prior to career ladders and a 3% turnover after the program was introduced.

Career ladders foster school-community involvement. The school as a community organization can be enhanced with the greater participation of career ladder personnel in the activities of the school/community. One district defined this goal as a form of two-way communications -- school expectations going out to the community and community input coming into the school. Fifty-four (93%) of the districts reported responsibilities completed in this area. Newsletters were most frequently used to open the communication between the home and school. Career ladder participants also held orientation programs, back-to-school nights and voter registration drives. An increase in PTO membership and participation in PTA/PTO organizations was seen for both patrons and teachers. Teachers were doing those things that put them into direct contact with parents and patrons. More parents were volunteering in the classroom and serving as resource

persons. These outcomes were seen to be a direct result of increased visibility of teachers at school and community functions. The assessment of this school-community goal was also measured by the positive statements being circulated in the district about the school.

Career ladders were reported to foster professional growth in 57 (98%) of the 58 districts. Virtually every career ladder participant chose one or more responsibilities in this area. Participants enrolled in workshops and continued their education. One district projected that within the next three years there would be a 150% increase in the number of teachers with a master's degree because of the career ladder incentive. Memberships in subject matter professional organization and in state and local teacher organizations increased and many teachers assumed active or leadership roles in these organizations. The assessment documents frequently credited the career ladder program as being a major boost to staff development, stimulating many teachers who had not participated in professional growth activities in the past to attend workshops and college classes.

Career ladders foster the sharing of ideas. Teacher isolation is one of the reasons cited by those who leave the profession early in their professional careers. Faculty sharing was specifically mentioned in 81% of the assessment reports. This sharing included modelling teaching procedures, sharing information at faculty meetings and lending personal materials. Several districts scheduled monthly meetings for sharing ideas. One district considered the "sharing" meetings to be the greatest asset of the program. Another respondent, after commenting that the faculty had always shared ideas and materials, credited career ladders with structuring these exchanges, and therefore,

increasing their frequency and effectiveness. There were increased collaborations between elementary and secondary staffs. Teachers were combining individual resources to better teach specific skills. "Teachers are working harder to help each other while working towards a common goal," was the comment in one document.

Career ladders foster faculty cooperation. Closely related to the concept of sharing is the collaboration and cooperation among faculty and administrators. This collaboration was reported as occurring in 79% of the districts. Career ladder participants volunteered to serve on school committees. Curriculums were revised. Grants were written and implemented. Career ladder teachers were serving as mentors to beginning teachers. Teachers and administrators were working together.

An additional career ladder goal that appeared in fewer than half of the assessment documents was the improvement of instruction. Twenty-four (41%) districts reported completed responsibilities in this area. Teachers were described as more innovative in their thinking and teaching. One district in noting the greater efforts in the classroom, commented on the cumulative effects of meeting career ladder goals. "If the goals of the program are sufficiently addressed, higher instructional quality is assured." Motivated teachers find new and better ways to facilitate learning.

District Surveys

Fifteen districts surveyed their staffs as a part of the assessment document. These individually designed survey questions asked for teachers' opinions about the value of the career ladder programs to themselves, students, school and community. In eleven of these

districts, the respondents agreed to the positive value of all aspects of the career ladder program. In four of the districts, the negative and positive responses were evenly divided among the respondents.

Not all eligible teachers participate in the local career ladder programs. Three districts as a part of their surveys asked, why not? Teachers' responses varied. Among their remarks were "disagreement with the philosophy of the program," "dislike of saying pay me more and I will do more," "career ladder activities take away from home, family and regular teaching obligations," and "too many requirements and too difficult." One district asked its 65 career ladder participants to list the activities that they would discontinue if career ladder money was no longer available. The result was a master list of 75 different activities that individual career ladder participants would drop, Another theme observed in the individual teacher comments was concern about the way the program is financed. Several teachers stated that they are having to participate in the career ladder program in order to earn money they already deserve. There is happiness that additional money is available, but unhappiness that teachers have to do extra work to receive it. Also, administrators were accused of using the career ladder money as a salary supplement not as an "extra" incentive. Teachers commented that the program should not take the place of salary increments. →

The participation level by eligible teachers in the district career ladder program was reported in only five assessment documents. (Eligible teachers are those teachers meeting longevity and performance evaluation requirements.) There was also a recognized increase

in career ladder participants in the second year of the program as some teachers "sat out" the first year of the program. Participation levels in these reporting districts ranged from 50% to 100%.

Site Visitations. Site visitations were made to 44 of the 60 districts between January, 1987 and January, 1989. Unstructured interviews were conducted with superintendents, principals and career ladder participants. Discrete and supporting information was sought from each group. Superintendents were asked for an overview of the entire district plan, including the degree of local board of education support of the program, financial constraints and the projections for continued participation by the district.

Principals were questioned regarding the evaluation of career ladder teachers and about the changes that have occurred in their evaluation of teacher participation in career ladder programs. Their overview of the career ladder process in the district was also sought. Career ladder participants were asked how their individual career development plans affected their personal and professional growth, interactions with colleagues and involvement in the school and community.

Superintendents reported that career ladders have resulted in special programs or activities that are beneficial to students. They believe that many of these programs would not have been initiated but for the career ladder incentive. The program rewarded those already going the "extra mile" and encouraged others to do so. One superintendent wondered why these programs had not already existed in the district, but felt that they would be continued even if career ladder funding ceased. Several superintendents commented on the "domino effect" with both career ladder participants and non-participants focusing their behaviors on district priorities.

Principals are a little less enthusiastic about the program. Career ladder participants must first meet performance evaluation requirements which they alone determine. Principals are, however, supportive of the program's goals and report pleasure in the increased involvement of teachers in the activities of the school and community.

Teachers frequently report satisfaction with the levels of staff participation in the district program. They want to make career ladders available to all eligible teachers. They report about colleagues who initially had been hesitant about the program, and who are now active supporters and participants in the process. Their concerns have changed from, "will career ladders cause friction within our staff?" to "how long will the program continue to be funded?"

Conclusion

This report on two years of career ladder experiences by 58 Missouri school districts used data from assessment documents and from interviews conducted at selected school sites. Both sources were used to evaluate the program, and both are necessary to get a total picture. The data from each document serves to highlight, support or otherwise explain the information found in the other.

There were many successes reported by the 58 districts that have implemented career ladder programs and filed assessment documents. New programs and projects benefiting students, teachers and community perhaps would not have happened without the career ladder incentive. Other programs and projects were continued with new enthusiasm. Local boards of education appreciated the increased activity and continued to fund the local share of the program.

The Missouri career ladder program demonstrates the qualities found in many of the well-designed programs as defined by Murphy and Hart (1986) and Rosenholtz (1986). (1) There are no quotas--all eligible teachers may apply, complete a career development plan and receive the career salary. (2) The defined responsibilities in a career development plan are related to the goals of the program and district priorities. (3) Teachers, administrators, and patrons were all involved in the design and implementation of the local program. (4) Career ladder teachers collaborate with their colleagues as curriculum leaders and mentor teachers. (5) Teachers share power and authority as members of the peer review team, responsible for reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating completed career development plans.

Whether the philosophy and the reward system of the program will endure is the overriding question. Certainly for many participants, career ladder programs are more than just a salary supplement, although the bonus salary is welcomed at the end of a school year. What teachers want most from their work is the satisfaction derived form their contributions to student achievement (Hawley, 1985). Extrinsic rewards such as additional salary is motivating only in the short term. The challenge for attracting and retaining the best and the brightest in the teaching profession, lies in the combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that respond to the long term needs of the teacher.

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A P P E N D I X

DISTRICT PARTICIPATION IN THE CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

Table I

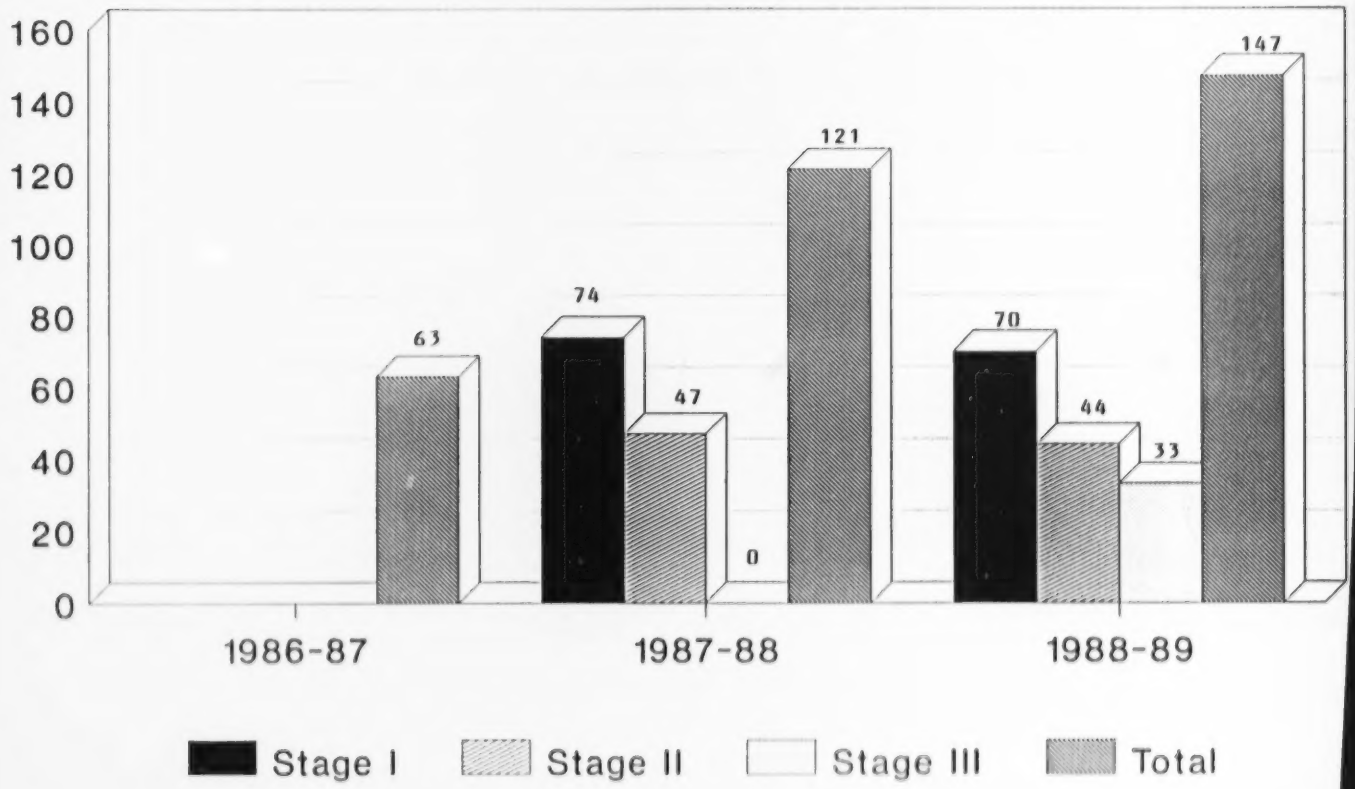


TABLE II

THE MISSOURI CAREER LADDER MODEL

STAGE I		STAGE II		STAGE III	
Qualifications	Responsibilities	Qualifications	Responsibilities	Qualifications	Responsibilities
1. Five years teaching experience in Missouri. 2. Appropriate certification. 3. Regular length, full-time contract. 4. Performance rating at expected level. 5. Career development plan.	Select a total of six responsibilities (at least one from each category). Personal/Professional growth. Faculty collaboration. School/community involvement.	1. *Complete two years at Stage I. 2. Appropriate certification. 3. Regular length, full-time contract. 4. Performance rating exceed expected level on two criteria. 5. Career development plan. Responsibilities at Stage II display "higher levels of sophistication."	Select a total of seven responsibilities (at least one from each category). Personal/professional growth. Faculty collaboration. School/community involvement. Responsibilities must reflect "higher levels of sophistication."	1. **Complete three years on Stage III. 2. Appropriate certification. 3. Regular length, full-time contract. 4. Performance rating exceed expected level on three criteria. 5. Career development plan. Responsibilities at State III display higher levels of sophistication."	Select a total of eight responsibilities (at least one from each category). Personal/professional growth. Faculty collaboration. School/community involvement. Responsibilities must reflect "higher levels of sophistication."

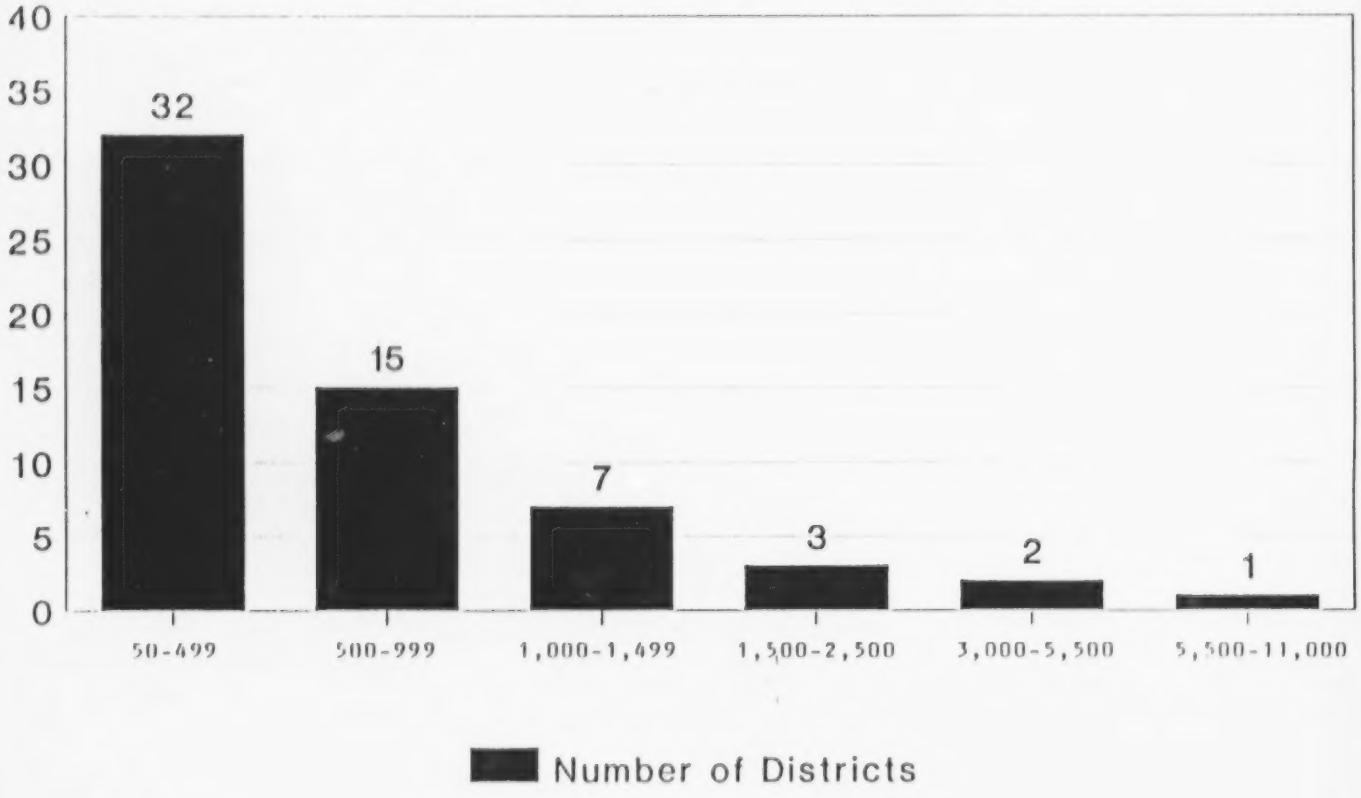
* Local Board of Education may waive one year of this requirement based on seven years of previous experience.

** Local Board of Education may waive two years of the requirement based on ten years of previous experience.

(from the Missouri Career Development and Teacher Excellence Plan, page 10.)

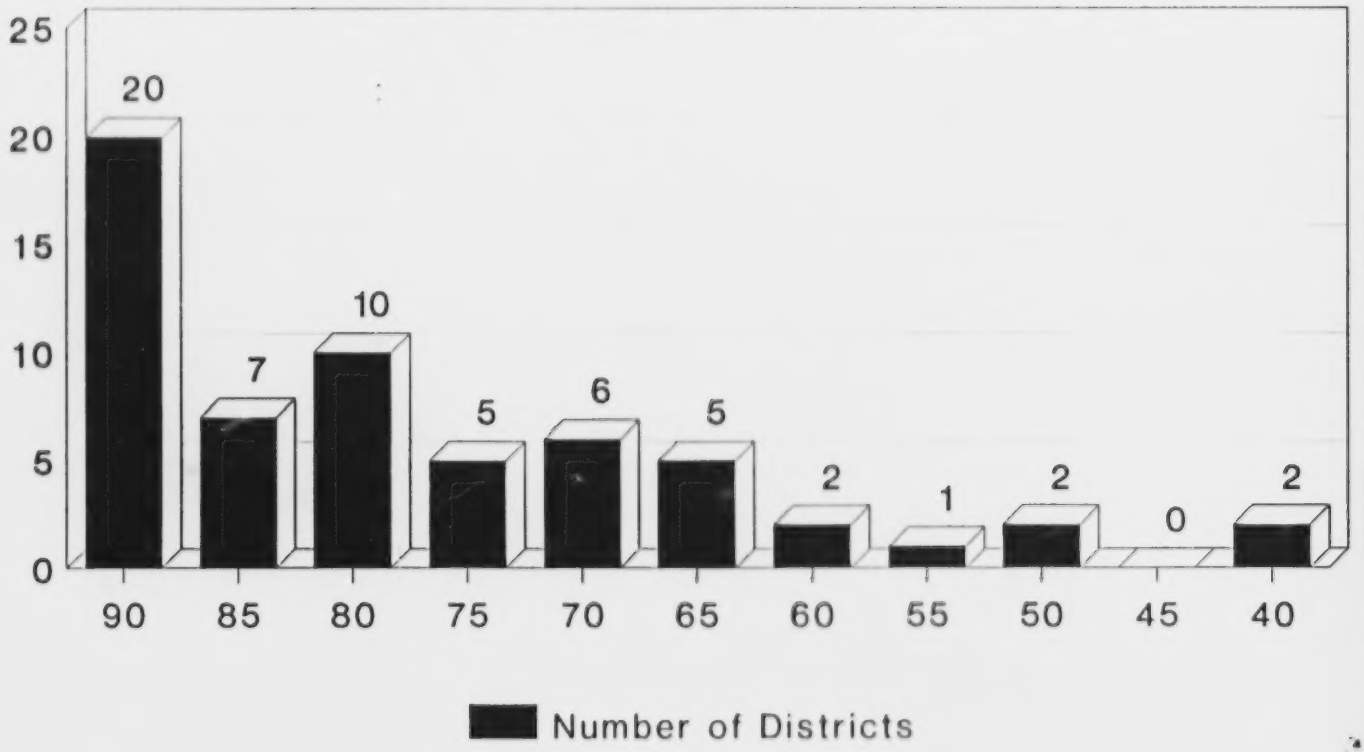
DISTRIBUTION OF CAREER LADDER DISTRICTS BY STUDENT SIZE

Table III



DISTRIBUTION OF CAREER LADDER DISTRICTS ACCORDING TO FUNDING MATCH

Table IV



Percent of Career Ladder Costs Paid to Local Districts by the State